If you always do what you’ve always done…

“If you always do what you’ve always done you will always get what you’ve always got”[[1]](#footnote-1) or put another way "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

As humans, we are born helpless and with only basic survival behaviours “pre-programmed”. One of these behaviours is our ability to learn from our surroundings and the other humans we are in contact with. This has the great advantage that it allows us to live in diverse climates, where extremely different talents and knowledge are required for our survival; it also enables us to live together within social groups by learning societal “norms” from those around us. Coming together with others increases our chances of survival so maintaining ourselves in terms that are acceptable within our community is experienced as deeply important.

Sometimes as we grow our experiencing is directly at odds with what we are told is acceptable within our group. For instance, at a very basic level, a boy may be told that “big boys don’t cry” or a girl be told it is not acceptable for her to climb trees with the boys. If these conditions of worth are repeated often and have a perceived importance, “Mummy/Daddy gets angry with me when I behave like this”, the child learns to adapt their behaviour and deny their experiencing: boy – I am sad, sad is bad, when I am sad I am bad; girl – climbing trees is fun, climbing trees is bad, when I climb trees I am bad. These beliefs are then integrated and become part of what the child believes about themselves and about how they *should* be within the community to be acceptable.

Children learn to stop being true to their experiencing self and begin to form a sense of the “ideal self” they *should* be to make them acceptable to others; where contradictory experiences keep coming up, “but I *am* sad”, “I *like* climbing trees”, they will often learn to feel guilty or ashamed of their experiences (and themselves) and hide them.

It is in this way that we form our sense of ourselves *in relation to* others and to the world and form our understanding of how the world *works* and our place within it. We see other people’s responses to seeing us, feel their responses to touching us and hear their responses to hearing us. Without feedback from other humans we have no way of understanding who we are.

These experiences form our *core beliefs* become the “operating system” we use to navigate life. Although we are able to learn and adapt our thoughts and behaviours throughout our lives these will remain in place, and form the basis for our way of being in the world, unless we are provided with some opportunity (a new relationship for example, leaving home or therapy) to experience ourselves *in relation* to and our personal experiencing differently.

1. Attributed to Henry Ford amongst others [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Albert Einstein [↑](#footnote-ref-2)